

**with a storm in his  
eyes**

**cathect**

## with a storm in his eyes by cathect

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**Summary:**

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“You’re wasting your hatred,” she says almost instantly. “Eddie is clearly still head over heels for you.”

There’s that word again. Still.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“God, Richie.” Beverly says. “How fucking blind can you be?”

He waits for her to elaborate, but all she does is stare at him.

“Are you going to explain, orrrr?”

“Honestly, Rich, if you can’t tell that Eddie still wants you after all these years, then I don’t know how to help you.”

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or the one where richie gets drunk and finally realizes how deep his feelings for eddie run.

[feat. beverly and richie as best friends and a lot of alcohol]

## with a storm in his eyes

### Author's Note:

a few notes about this fic:

- this is a modern, high-school age au set at the end of the losers' senior year.
- richie and eddie are both eighteen.
- the events of "it" have not taken place in this au.
- i do not condone (or recommend) underage drinking.
- this fic is based solely on my seeing the 2017 movie. i haven't seen the miniseries and i never finished the book. so, if there's anything that doesn't match the canon perfectly, that's why.

additionally: i would like to thank erin, sarah, and han for helping me so much with this fic. you guys have been lifesavers (especially erin, who wrote most of the last scene).

*"Love, like everything else in life, should be a discovery, an adventure, and like most adventures, you don't know you're having one until you're right in the middle of it."*

- E.A. Bucchianeri

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"Can I ask you a personal question?" Beverly asks from her spot at Richie's desk. She's got her feet propped up and her thumb between the pages of the book she'd been reading.

She's been mostly quiet up until now, along with the rest of the Tozier home. His parents aren't around yet again, which makes his room the optimal place for studying.

Not that they're ever *actually* studying; Richie mentioned his parents' absence earlier in the week and Beverly has taken it upon herself to ensure he isn't alone. He likes to act like it's unnecessary, but he

really does appreciate it.

Except for when she's prying into his personal life, that is.

"If I tell you no, are you going to do it anyway?" Richie barely looks up as he answers, scrunching his nose to adjust the position of his glasses.

"Obviously."

He sighs over-dramatically at her words, finally looking up from his laptop.

"Well then fuckin' go for it, I guess."

Beverly swivels in the chair so she can put her feet on the ground and inch it closer to his bed without having to get up.

"Why haven't you ever dated anyone?" Her blue eyes are wide and curious, and it almost makes him feel bad that she's not going to get a good answer out of him.

"I don't know." He shrugs nonchalantly, hoping it's the end of the conversation.

It's not the first time one of the Losers has asked him. They're close to graduating high school now, and he's the only one to have remained single the whole time. Beverly has been dating Ben for what feels like forever, Mike's got a girlfriend he met online, and Bill and Stan have been on and off since freshman year.

Hell, even Eddie had a boyfriend for a few months. An older guy—someone he met at some party Bev had dragged the Losers to. The guy turned out to be a dick, so it didn't last long, but Eddie always says he never regrets it.

"What do you mean you don't know?" Bev asks, searching his face for any other answer. He shrugs, tucking his legs underneath his body. "There must be a reason."

"Well, fucking surprise! There's not." He pauses, wondering if the

slight venom in his voice comes across as normal for him, or if she's noticed it's a bit of a sensitive topic.

"Whatever." She says, but she's smiling so he figures he's in the clear. "Don't tell me. That's fine. I'm only your best friend." Rolling his eyes at her fake-accusatory tone, he picks up his phone to check his texts.

In the two hours that he and Beverly have been hanging out, the Losers' group chat has managed to blow up his phone with 143 messages, which is hardly a surprise (their all-time record is upwards of three hundred in under an hour). Other than that, his only notification is from Snapchat.

Opening the app, he sees the red square next to Eddie's name—*Fanny Pack* — and he taps on it instantly.

It's a simple selfie, Eddie flipping him off in response to whatever Richie had sent him— suddenly he can't remember what it was— but it makes his heart practically leap out of his chest. He tries to fight the smile threatening to break out on his face so that Bev doesn't ask any questions, but it comes anyway.

"You gonna go?" Beverly asks suddenly. Richie looks up from his phone, locking it even though the snap has already disappeared.

"Hmm?"

"The party, dumbass." She shakes her head when he still looks confused, holding up her phone. "Bill's talking about it in the group chat."

Sure enough, when Richie scrolls back through the messages, the Losers are discussing some "graduation party" happening on Saturday night. It's hard to find the details among Stan and Bill's flirty bickering— they're currently in an *on* stage of their relationship— but he finally finds the time and place.

"Well, I want to say no." Richie says, then sighs. "But I know you fuckers will make me go anyway." Beverly smiles, running a hand through her hair.

"You're right." Standing up, she stretches out her arms before she

pushes his chair back under his desk. “Anyway, I have to go meet Ben.” She hesitates for a moment and her eyes flick to his open bedroom door that leads out into an empty house. He can practically see the gears in her brain turning, wondering if it would be weird to invite him out along.

Richie gives up on trying to tell her he’s fine with just a look in his eyes. He reigns in a sigh and tells her, “Have fun!”

Beverly doesn’t seem entirely satisfied, but it’s enough for her to drop it. She gives him a small nod. “But I’ll pick you up Saturday night, yeah?” She asks once she’s at the threshold of his door.

“Yeah.” Richie knows better than to argue with her. Besides, if all the Losers are going, he doesn’t really have a choice.

Beverly blows him a kiss— a loud one, making sure to emphasize the *muah* — and leaves his room with a smile. A few minutes later he hears her car back out of his driveway, and he finally feels alone enough to raise his phone and take a selfie.

He glares for the camera, captions it “your hair looks dumb” and sends it to Eddie. It’s a total lie.

In reality, Richie loves Eddie’s hair. He’s cut it shorter since last year, and never uses any product in it anymore. It just exists, a little wavy and a lot perfect. Richie has always wished his hair would behave like that. Instead, it’s only gotten curlier and less manageable over time.

Eddie’s response comes less than a minute later.

*“You look dumb. ”*

It’s a picture of Eddie glaring right back, but there’s a smile tugging at the corners of his lips. He looks so cute that Richie is tempted to screenshot it, but he can’t come up with a good enough excuse as to why he would before the snap disappears.

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When Saturday rolls around, Richie is tempted as *hell* to bail on the

party.

Sure, it would be fun to hang out with his friends; to get a little drunk with Bev, or to watch Stan try to dance. But, at the same time, it sounds emotionally draining to the point of giving him the feeling he needs to take a nap before he's even gotten dressed.

Then Eddie sends a selfie to the group chat.

"How's this look?" Reads the message that's paired with a mirror selfie. He's wearing a simple, black, short-sleeved button-up shirt and jeans, but Richie's heart immediately tries to break its way out of his ribs again. Suddenly he really wants to go to this party.

He's in way too fucking deep.

He manages to throw on jeans and a light grey tee shirt just as Beverly calls to say she's in his driveway. When he gets outside, Ben is already moving into the back seat. Richie smiles.

(He once called *shotgun times infinity* on Beverly's car.)

"Thanks, Benny-boy." He calls just as Ben is closing the door. Even from ten feet away, Richie can see him roll his eyes and say something to Bev. "I heard that!" Richie yells, even though he didn't. Beverly honks at him, trying to get him to move faster.

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Of course it's at a fucking frat house.

Richie really should have known it wasn't a graduation party— at least not in its conception— when he saw the address, but he hadn't really comprehended how close the street is to Derry University.

He's surrounded by drunk frat guys hitting on everything that breathes. On top of that, the bass is turned up way too high, and there's so much smoke in the air— *cigarette* smoke; Richie wouldn't mind *weed*— that he feels like he's an extra in *Stranger Things*.

"Ha-have you guys s-seen Stan?" Bill asks, coming up to Richie and Beverly with two red cups in his hands. "I went to get h-him a drink

and n-n-now he's gone."

"I think I saw him by the beer pong table a few minutes ago." Bev says, nodding her head in that general direction.

"He's fucking shit at that game." Richie chimes in. "You might want to go stop him from embarrassing himself."

"D-dammit Stan." Bill mutters to himself, knocking back one of his drinks before setting down the other and making a beeline for his boyfriend.

"He really is terrible, isn't he?" Beverly winces as someone actually picks Stan for their partner. "That guy's doomed." Richie snorts in response, then clears his throat.

"Hey, have you seen Eddie?" He asks, making sure not to make direct eye contact with Beverly, trying to seem as casual as humanly possible.

"Aren't you two normally joined at the hip?" She's not looking at him either, so she misses the way he looks down at his cup instead of answering.

He's trying to think of how to respond when the song changes and Beverly practically screeches next to him.

"Oh my fucking god." She says as the few people around them turn to find the source of the noise. "I *love* this song. Come dance with me, Rich."

Richie is the only one that Beverly ever asks to dance. He acts annoyed every single time, but the truth is that he loves it. Especially at parties like this, where everyone is just drunk enough to not comprehend that he actually knows what he's doing on a dance floor.

"You're lucky you're fucking my friend." He says it in the same tone that he would normally say *you're lucky you're my best friend* to her.

"Isn't she?" Ben jokes as he joins them. Richie rolls his eyes.

"I was just asking Richie to dance with me." Beverly explains. "Will

you—”

“Hold your phone so you don’t break it like last time?” Ben guesses. The redhead smiles guiltily and nods. Ben raises his hand, palm up, and she practically throws her phone into it before grabbing onto Richie’s hand and dragging him to the makeshift dance floor.

Beverly’s been pretty tipsy for at least an hour now, so Richie barely even flinches when she throws her arms around him, pulling him close to dance. He rests his hands against her back gently, feeling the thrum of the bass in the back of his skull.

There was a time when Ben hated this. A time when he thought Beverly practically grinding on Richie while drunk at a party actually meant something to either of them.

In reality, Richie is the only one Bev feels comfortable enough to dance with like this (besides her boyfriend, of course, but Ben hates to dance). And it’s specifically because it *doesn’t* mean anything to them. Sure, Beverly is kind, funny, blue-eyed and gorgeous, but she’s not exactly his type.

Speaking of his type, there’s still no sign of Eddie as the first song fades into a second, then a third.

At one point, some frat guy tries to cut in, touching Beverly’s arm and whispering something in her ear. Before she even has a chance to react, Richie is pulling her closer (if that’s even humanly possible with the way she’s latched onto him like a koala) and turning so that his back is to the guy and she’s safely on the other side. Ben, who’s noticed the whole exchange, offers Richie a gracious smile.

It’s not that Richie thinks Beverly can’t defend herself, because she sure as fuck can.

(He once came back from grabbing a drink at a party, only to see her taking on two *much* bigger guys who’d apparently approached her while he was gone. Needless to say, they each left with their own respective bloody noses.)

He just thinks that she shouldn’t *have* to defend herself.

She should be allowed to have a good time dancing without some fuckass drunk guy thinking it's some sort of invitation.

Richie is pulled away from his thoughts when Beverly throws her head to the side and a strand of her red hair manages to fall over the top of his glasses and into his eye. He blinks a few times, pulling one of his hands away from her to try and tug it back down to her shoulder. But he's sweating from all the dancing, and his glasses are already so far down the bridge of his nose that he somehow succeeds in causing them to slip off his face entirely.

He sees his whole life flash before his eyes in one very blurry moment as they hit the ground.

There's at least a hundred people in this general area of the frat house alone, and he knows that, by the time he manages to untangle himself from Beverly, they'll likely be crushed beyond recognition. The death certificate of his poor Ray Bans has already been signed, sealed, and delivered.

"Richie."

Or maybe not.

When Richie looks over his right shoulder, there's Eddie. He's got a half-smirk on his face and Richie's glasses in his hand.

"One of these days, I'm going to buy you one of those ugly chains to keep these on." The shorter boy says, gesturing for Richie to lean down. When he does so, Eddie carefully pushes his glasses back onto his face. "Sometimes I honestly don't know what you'd do without me."

*I'd be lost.*

"Glad you finally decided to show up." Is what comes out instead, Richie's big mouth doing what it does best—deflecting and denying every real emotion that he feels.

The corners of Eddie's mouth twitch into a frown for a split second before he rolls his eyes and shoves Richie's shoulder. He doesn't say anything else before he walks away, heading in the general direction

of the kitchen. Richie's tempted to follow him, but he knows he can't leave Bev.

At least, not until two songs later, when Richie has to physically drag her off the dance floor.

(The limit is five songs before he forces her to drink some water.)

When they get to the kitchen, Eddie's still there. He's standing by the bar, a bottle of water in his hand, talking to some guy that Richie's never seen before. A guy that's standing just a little too close to him for it to be a casual conversation.

Despite the jealousy blooming in his chest, Richie knows that Beverly's hydration is his number one priority at the moment.

"Hurry uuuuup." Beverly groans, hanging on his arm. "I want to keep dancing."

"Yeah, yeah." He responds, making his way to the fridge and yanking open the door. It takes him a minute or so to dig around among the beer bottles and find some water. When he finally does, he pushes it into Beverly's palm. "Drink."

She doesn't argue, downing half of the bottle in about three seconds. When she lets out an obnoxious *ahh*, Richie shakes his head and chuckles.

"You're a fucking mess, you know that?"

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Beverly convinces Richie to dance to a few more songs before she sobers up a little.

It's around one in the morning now, and they've found their way to the room with the pool table. Bill, who is somehow a master at 8 ball, is halfway through a game with one of the frat guys, and Beverly, Richie, and Stan are piled together on the couch, quietly cheering him on.

"Have you guys seen Eddie?" Mike asks as he comes in the room.

Richie hadn't even known Mike was at the party.

"No, why?" Stan asks.

"I want to go put my jacket in his car."

"Last I saw, he was in the kitchen talking to Bryce." Beverly doesn't look up from her phone as she speaks, typing away at a text message. She's leaning on Richie's shoulder, her legs thrown across his and Stan's laps.

*Bryce? So the guy has a name.*

"Bryce?" Stan asks, leaning forward and looking across Richie's chest at Beverly. Lifting her eyes to meet his, she shrugs. "Doesn't really seem like Eddie's type."

"Eddie has a type?" Richie asks before he can stop himself. Fighting to keep his face as straight as possible, he snaps his mouth shut and mentally slaps himself. Fortunately for him, the question only comes across to the others as one of his usual bitchy jokes, and they all laugh.

"But, yeah. I haven't seen Eddie in like an hour or so." Stan says, standing up and stretching his arms behind his back. "I'll help you find him."

"Thanks, man."

Stan steps over abandoned bottles and crushed red cups and heads over to Bill to tell him what's going on. He speaks directly in his boyfriend's ear, fighting to be heard over the music— it's still just as loud in the rooms adjacent to the one with the speakers. Once Bill nods his understanding, Stan and Mike leave to find their friend.

"You think Eddie's still with that guy?" Richie asks Beverly as casually as he possibly can. The redhead shrugs, looking up at him and almost knocking her head into his jaw in the process.

"Dunno." She says. "Why do you ask?" But Richie's not listening.

He's thinking about Eddie and Bryce. He's wondering if Eddie's been

with him the whole time he hasn't been with the Losers. Had Eddie come to the party with him? No, Mike would have said something about it. Right?

"Rich." Beverly says, waving her hand in front of his face. When he finds her eyes, she laughs a little. "Where'd you go just now?"

Fuck, he's *jealous*. Like, *really* jealous.

"I need some fucking air." Richie stands up, pushing her legs out of his lap gently.

"Do you want me to come with you?" Beverly calls after him, but he doesn't answer. Trying to remember where he saw the glass door that leads to the backyard, he pushes through the crowd of drunk college students.

He finally finds his way outside, and takes a few deep breaths of the cool night air, trying to process what just went down in his head.

His feelings for Eddie have never been something he was in denial about—he's had a thing for him since they were kids. No, the shock comes from the fact that it's definitely not *just* "a thing" anymore.

Having "a thing" for someone doesn't justify the amount of jealousy that Richie just felt in his veins. It doesn't explain why he started seeing red in the corners of his eyes at the thought of Eddie with anybody else.

"Richie?" Beverly's voice is soft behind him. He's still standing in what's more or less the center of the doorway, so she has to squeeze past him in order to stand on the porch. "Are you okay? I don't think I've ever seen you move that fast."

That's a good fucking question. *Is* he okay?

"I'm fine." He lies through his teeth, taking a seat in one of the orange plastic chairs to their right. Bev follows suit and sits in one as well.

"You're not." And it's not like Richie had thought he'd be able to lie to her, he'd just been hoping she'd be the kind of best friend that

drops it, not the one who pushes on.

He really should have known better.

"I'm not."

He doesn't continue immediately, but Beverly is patient. Scooting her chair closer, she rests a comforting hand against his forearm. Richie tries to figure out how to say all of what he's feeling.

"You remember how the other day you asked me why I've never dated anyone?" He decides that's a pretty good place to start. A confused look passes over Beverly's face, but she nods. Taking a deep breath, he continues. "It's because of Eddie."

Beverly only looks more confused now.

"Eddie?" she asks. "What do you—"

Her voice trails off as Richie gives her a pointed look. They share many different kinds of eye contact and, about thirty seconds later, Beverly's eyebrows shoot up into her hairline in shock.

"Oh my god," she says. Richie wants to curl up into himself. "Oh my god— oh my *god*, Richie. *Still?*"

Okay, that's not what he was expecting.

"What do you mean, 'still'?" He asks. Beverly lets out a half-nervous, half-sarcastic laugh.

"Well. I mean, I knew that you had a thing for him when we were younger," she explains with a shrug. "But when you never did anything about it, I assumed you'd just sort of... gotten over it."

"I wish." Richie sighs and rests his head against the back of his chair. "But apparently it's only gotten worse."

"Oh my god, that's why you were asking about Bryce." Beverly isn't even really talking to him. It's more like she's trying to process all of it and the only way to do it is out loud.

“Yeah,” he answers anyway. “I don’t think I’ve ever hated a total stranger that much.”

“You’re wasting your hatred,” she says almost instantly. “Eddie is clearly still head over heels for you.”

There’s that word again. *Still*.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“God, Richie.” Beverly says. “How fucking blind can you be?”

He waits for her to elaborate, but all she does is stare at him.

“Are you going to explain, orrrr?”

“Honestly, Rich, if you can’t tell that Eddie still wants you after all these years, then I don’t know how to help you.”

Suddenly, Richie has several questions.

“Anyway, Ben’s looking for me.” Beverly stands and Richie throws his hand out, grabbing onto her wrist gently.

“You can’t just leave after saying something like that,” he says, earning a chuckle from his best friend.

“Of course I can.”

“You’re a bitch sometimes.” Richie says, even though he doesn’t mean it in the slightest. Beverly winks and leans down to kiss the side of his head gently. His eyes close for a moment, surprisingly comforted by the platonic affection.

“I know, right?” And with that, she disappears back into the house.

Richie spends a good majority of the next hour thinking about what Beverly said.

Has it really always been that obvious? Has Eddie known the whole time? And what the hell did she mean about Eddie “still wanting him”?

He would be able to tell if his feelings were reciprocated, right? He'd know if Eddie was stealing glances just like he was, if he also laid awake at night just... wondering.

He'd know, right?

It's all a little too much, and Richie decides to go inside and find a drink— preferably something strong. A voice in the back of his head tells him there's nothing strong enough to distract from his Eddie Thoughts™, even for a minute.

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The next time he sees Eddie, Richie is just a *little* bit drunk.

It's nearing three in the morning at this point, and half the Losers have already gone home. In fact, Ben— the designated driver for the night— has just finished dropping off Mike, Bill, and Stan at their respective houses. Now he's parked a little ways down the street, waiting for Richie and Beverly.

"You ready to go home, Rich?" Bev asks, looking down at him. They're on the same couch from earlier; Beverly's got her feet propped up on the beer-stained coffee table, and Richie is sprawled out across the leather with his head in her lap.

She's even more sober now, so she's taken on his previous role of "making sure the drunk one doesn't die." In the years they've been friends, they've always been good about switching off.

"Nooooooo." He whines, shaking his head as best he can. Bev chuckles, pushing some loose curls back off of his forehead.

"C'mon, drunk." She says, gingerly slipping both of her hands behind his head and helping him sit up without getting dizzy. "Time to go."

Richie groans once he's upright. Immediately, he falls against her shoulder for support before she can stand up.

"I don't want to go home." He's drunk, and his inhibitions are even lower than normal, and the true emotion behind his words peeks

through for a moment.

Richie's home life has always been awful, but it's gotten worse lately — somehow his impending graduation has brought about a monsoon of bullshit. He hasn't brought it up to Beverly, but he doesn't have to.

She's his best friend. She always knows when there's been a bigger fight, a larger weight on his chest. She always knows when his heart is in the most pain.

He's strong, stronger than most. And Beverly knows that if anyone can handle living under that roof, it's Richie. She's told him so in the past and, with an equally stony and sympathetic look in her eyes, she tells him so now. She doesn't even need to say it out loud, really; Richie knows her opinions on the matter. But she says it anyway and Richie is grateful for it.

"I know." Her voice is soft as she stands and tugs her with him. "But you have to."

*"Just twenty-six more days until graduation. And then you and I will be going to college somewhere far away from this fucking town."* It's a promise they've made for years, counting down the days together until they can finally get the hell out of Derry.

"You guys heading out?" A voice asks as they near the front of the house. When they turn around, there's Eddie, in the middle of patting himself down, apparently digging in his pockets for his keys. He looks frantic for a split second before the tell-tale chime of several keys and the trinkets attached fills the silence between them. He nods triumphantly, and suddenly Beverly gets a look in her eyes that Richie knows to fear (and kind of adore, in equal measure).

Richie realizes suddenly, Beverly has an *idea*.

"Yeah. Ben's waiting outside." She fakes a quick, concerned glance at Richie (okay, maybe the concerned part isn't so fake), before she grins like she's had an idea that'll go down in history. "Hey, actually, this is perfect."

Richie picks up on her tone in less than a second, just as quickly as he

picked up on that glint her eyes.

“Don’t you dare.” He whispers. Luckily, there’s just enough noise still going on around them that Eddie doesn’t seem to notice. Unluckily, Beverly ignores him.

“Richie is on the other side of town, much closer to you,” she says. “Any chance you’re sober enough to drive him home?” Richie is absolutely seething next to her.

Eddie doesn’t notice that either.

“Yeah, sure.” He says casually. “I wasn’t drinking tonight.”

“Why not?” Richie asks before he can stop himself, so he tacks on, “It’s a fuckin’ party, Eds.” A blush creeps up Eddie’s neck.

“I wanted to be sure there would be a safe option for people to get home.”

*God fucking dammit, that’s cute.*

“Well, I’m glad you did.” Beverly smiles, turning to Richie and grasping his hands. “You okay if Eddie drives you home?” She gives him a sly smile that practically *dares* him to object. For a second, he debates doing it just to foil her plan.

“Yeah, sure, whatever.” Richie says finally. He wishes his tone didn’t come across so bitchy. “Thanks, Eds.”

“Don’t call me Eds.”

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The familiar ride to Richie’s house is mostly silent.

Eddie has the radio on, but it’s turned down so low that it might as well not be. Somehow it’s more awkward than total silence.

“Where were you all night?” Richie tries to convince himself that he’s just making casual conversation, not pushing Eddie to tell him about Bryce .

“What do you mean?” Eddie asks. “I was at the party.”

“Yeah, I fucking know *that*.” Richie says. “But where were you? Didn’t really see you all night. None of us did.”

Eddie is silent for a moment, and Richie can practically hear his brain working. He’s very pointedly looking straight ahead, like his neck would break if he tried to look anywhere else.

“I was hanging out with someone.” He says it like it’s a both an answer and a question all its own. Richie clears his throat, sitting up a little bit in his seat.

“Yeah, I saw that.” Following Eddie’s lead, he looks out at the road. “Who was he?”

They both pretend not to notice the change in Richie’s tone.

“A friend.” Eddie says. “Sort of. I guess.”

Richie is silent, waiting for Eddie to continue. When he doesn’t, Richie curses the other boy for making him have to ask.

“Just a friend?” He clears his throat, adding, “Because the way he was leaning over you in the kitchen makes me think that somebody’s getting laaaaaid.”

And, for a moment, he sounds like *Richie* again, like his regular old trashmouth self. Calling on that voice he used to use for making jokes about fucking his friends’ moms. He guesses that it’s his subconscious attempt to not seem like he’s prying more than a normal friend would. When they pass a streetlight, Richie glances over in time to see that Eddie’s ears are pink.

“You saw that?”

“So I’m right, then?”

“I— I don’t—” Eddie clears his throat. “Can we talk about something else, please?”

“Sorry, Eds.” Richie throws his hands up in mock-defense. “I just

figured that if you're going to flaunt your man-candy, you should be willing to talk about him."

"Don't call me Eds." It sounds more like a jab than normal, and Richie feels something heavy settle in his chest. He snaps his mouth shut. "Sorry, I just— He's not man-candy. And I wasn't *flaunting* him."

"Then what is he?"

"I don't know!" Eddie pulls one of his hands from the wheel to run it through his hair. "He was... cute and flirty and fun to talk to, I guess. It's nice to have someone pay attention to you every once in awhile."

The heaviness in Richie's chest drops down to the pit of his stomach.

"Eddie—"

"I know, I know." Eddie cuts him off. "That's pretty pathetic, right?"

*It's not pathetic.* For some reason, Richie can't seem to say it out loud.

"But I'm not like you guys." The other boy continues, his grip on the wheel tightening to the point that his knuckles glow white in the moonlight. "I'm not used to being the guy someone wants to flirt with at a party."

"So he didn't come with you?" Richie had already pretty much ruled that out as a possibility, but he can't help needing Eddie's confirmation. "To the party, I mean."

"What? Richie— no." Eddie says, eyebrows dropping low. "No, he just offered me a drink and, when I said no, he used it to start up a conversation."

Richie is starting to wonder how far into the conversation they had been when he'd caught a glance of them. By the looks of it, they'd graduated far past talking about drinks.

"Oh." Is all Richie can manage to say.

"Yeah." Eddie responds.

They're silent after that, until they reach Richie's driveway.

"Thanks for the ride." Richie says awkwardly, unbuckling his seatbelt and opening his door to get out. Eddie shakes his head and mirrors his movements. "What are you doing?" Eddie's out of the car before Richie can even finish asking the question.

"Walking you up, obviously." There's a beep— one that's way too loud for the hangover already forming in the back of Richie's head—as Eddie locks his car.

"You don't have to do that." Richie says, but Eddie is already heading up the walkway to his front door.

"Yes I do." Eddie says over his shoulder as Richie picks up his pace to catch up. "Over a thousand people die from falling down the stairs each year, so I'm going to make sure you get up to your room okay."

Richie wants to kiss him right then and there.

"God, Eds. You're still such a nerd." He says instead.

*Nice, Richie.*

"I'm going to punch you if you don't stop calling me that."

"Promise?" Richie asks, wiggling his eyebrows even though Eddie can't see it in the dark— he didn't bother leaving a light on when he left.

"Ugh, god." Eddie says, arms crossed over his chest as he waits for Richie to unlock the front door. "Keep your weird fetishes to yourself, Tozier."

"That's not what your mom said last night."

Eddie gives up after that, but he'd been fighting back, and that's what's important. Richie swears his jaw is going to crack from smiling so fucking hard.

When Richie finally gets the door open, the house is silent. It's not an unexpected thing, considering he's come in so late. But there's an

isolating element to it, and he's pretty sure his parents *still* aren't back from wherever they've disappeared to this time.

"Wait here."

Eddie doesn't argue, staying put in the front hall as Richie quickly combs through the downstairs rooms— he doesn't need to even glance up the stairs to know they're not up there.

When he's sure that he and Eddie are alone, he turns on a couple of lights here and there and returns to his friend. Eddie looks like he wants to ask, but he keeps his mouth shut.

"You want a drink?" Richie asks as he passes by Eddie and goes into the kitchen. "I think the only things we have cold are my mom's girly shit, but my dad's got a few bottles in the cabinet."

"Do you think that's a good idea?" Eddie asks, and Richie can feel his eyes on his lower back as he digs in the bottom shelf of the refrigerator door. "I mean, you need to get some sleep, and I should be heading out."

"You're really going to let me drink alone?" Richie asks, straightening back up with a pout. It's a bit of a mean tactic, playing off of Eddie's natural concern, something Richie realizes belatedly. He changes his approach quickly, and softens his expression into a sly smile as he says, "Come on, Eds, you're telling me you don't want to get just a *little* bit fucked up?"

The silent *with me* hangs in the air between them.

They stare at each other for about ten seconds or so before Eddie is sighing and setting his keys down on the counter.

"What kind of girly shit?" He asks cautiously. Richie's mouth breaks into a full-on grin and Eddie can't help but smile back.

And so, they drink a little bit.

Okay, Richie drinks *a lot*, but Eddie doesn't seem to mind as he sips

on the same bottle of a hard strawberry lemonade for about an hour. That's Eddie, though. Always making sure he's got a clear enough head to make decisions.

It's fucking infuriating.

But that's mostly because Richie can feel his inhibitions lowering with every half-assed shot of his dad's fireball that he takes. Eddie watches on, eyes so big and brown that Richie thinks he might slip up and tell him they're beautiful.

Richie's honestly losing count of how many shots are settling in his stomach, and it's only when Eddie steps in that he stops.

"I think that's enough, Rich." The smaller boy's voice has taken on a protective air around its edges and Richie rolls his eyes.

"You sound like your mom." Richie reaches for the bottle again, but Eddie snatches it away. "You are seriously *no* fun, Eds."

"Don't call me that." Eddie looks at the mess Richie's made on the coffee table, sighing as he starts to pick up.

"Don't bother." Richie says, surveying a stain on his shirt and trying to figure out where it came from. "Even if they actually come back tonight, they won't notice or care."

There's a beat of silence where Richie realizes how his own words sound, and he opens his mouth to reassure his friend, but Eddie's hand is suddenly curling around his bicep and pulling him to a standing position.

"Let's get you to bed."

"Now you *really* sound like your mom." Richie says suggestively and Eddie groans.

"I never thought I'd like you better sober." He mutters under his breath as Richie throws an arm around his shoulders for support he doesn't really need.

"You like me all the time."

“I’m starting to regret it.”

They climb the stairs carefully, much slower than normal. Eddie’s fingers dig into Richie’s side, just below his ribs, keeping him upright every time he stumbles even slightly. At this point, Richie honestly can’t tell if the bubbling in his stomach is from the alcohol or from being so close to Eddie. He tightens his grip on his friend’s shoulder.

“You know I love you, right Eds?” The words burst out of Richie’s chest like they’ve been trying to escape for years— now that he thinks about it, they probably have.

“Yeah, Richie. I know.” Eddie rolls his eyes, practically dragging Richie the rest of the way up the stairs. Richie opens his mouth to elaborate, but they’ve reached the top, and Eddie quite literally throws him into his room.

He takes a moment to collect himself, to organize his thoughts a little better, as Eddie stretches out his shoulder as though the weight of Richie against him had been unbearable.

“No, Eddie.” His voice comes out a little hoarse and he clears his throat. Eddie’s eyes meet his, and it gives him the last push he needs. “I love you.”

Despite what Beverly said, he expects Eddie to be surprised or confused; to brush the statement off with a joke or maybe even laugh at him.

Instead, Eddie moves forward until he’s right in front of Richie. He’s taller now than he used to be, but still much smaller than Richie, and has to drop his head back just to look him in the eyes.

For a moment, Eddie just searches Richie’s face like he might find the answer to a question he hasn’t asked yet. Richie’s pretty sure he’s not breathing.

“You’re drunk.” Eddie finally decides. Richie snorts.

“Oh I’m absolutely shit-faced.” He says, pulling a laugh from deep in Eddie’s stomach. “But eventually, I’m going to be *not* drunk, and I’ll

love you then too.”

Eddie falls silent again, eyes still scanning over his face like he’s looking for the punchline.

“You need sleep.” He says, and if Richie wasn’t so drunk, he’d be pissed Eddie thought that was an acceptable response. “We can talk about this in the morning.”

“Eddie—”

“In the morning.” Eddie repeats, pointing forcefully at Richie’s bed. Richie rolls his eyes and kicks off his shoes, not even bothering to change his clothes before he crawls under the covers.

When he hears a dull thud, he looks over to see Eddie dropping his own shoes on the ground.

“What are you doing?” He asks. Eddie shrugs, coming over and plopping down in the space on the bed Richie isn’t taking up.

“Staying with you until you fall asleep.”

“You haven’t done that since we were kids.”

There was a time when the only way Richie could fall asleep was when Eddie was there. Whether he was right next to him— having snuck in Richie’s window late at night— or he was just a comforting voice on the other end of a phone call, Richie always got his best night’s rest when Eddie was with him.

“I just want to make sure that you don’t choke on your own vomit and die in your sleep.” Eddie says it like he doesn’t mean it.

“God, Eds.” Richie shoots back. “I’m not even that drunk.”

“Yes you are.” Eddie shakes his head, grabbing one of Richie’s extra pillows off the ground and putting it behind his back for support. “Now go to sleep.”

“Don’t tell me what to do.” But, even as he says it, Richie is pulling his blankets tighter around his shoulders and settling into his

mattress, the allure of sleep finally getting to him.

The last feeling he processes before he passes out is Eddie's fingers, feather-light against his cheek. Then he's pulling off Richie's glasses and putting them on the nightstand.

"I love you too." Eddie whispers. "Dumbass."

When Richie wakes up in the morning, Eddie is still there.

He's slipped down from where he'd been sitting, and one of Richie's arms managed to drape itself over Eddie's chest in the middle of the night. He can feel the other boy's heartbeat under his wrist, steady and reassuring.

"You awake?" Eddie asks, tilting his head to look over at his friend. Richie hadn't even realized Eddie was conscious.

"Mm." Richie responds.

They stay like that for a little while longer. Eddie even shifts down farther on the bed and closer to Richie. It's quiet, the only sound coming from their breathing and Richie's own heartbeat in his ears.

"Listen," he says finally, "about what I said last night—"

"You can take it back." Eddie is quick to reply. "If you want to, I mean. If you want an out, I'll give it to you." Richie looks up at him.

"Why would I want to take it back?" He asks, voice quieter than he thinks it's ever been. Eddie shrugs.

"I don't know," he says. "You were drunk. People say things they don't mean when they're drunk."

"Not me." Richie lifts his hand to Eddie's face, resting it gently against the smaller boy's cheek. "I meant it then. I mean it now. I love you."

"Richie—"

"I'm serious, Eddie."

"I know." Eddie says, rolling his eyes as he turns his body to face Richie's. "I'm trying to say it back, stupid." Richie strokes his thumb across Eddie's cheek.

"Sorry." He says, smiling a little as he feels his face go warm. "Go ahead."

"Well, now I kind of don't want to." Eddie manages to sound serious despite the grin on his face. Richie offers a pout and Eddie sighs. "Alright, okay, fine. I love you too, idiot."

"I know." Richie responds immediately.

"You're a dick."

"I know."

Richie can barely wrap his head around the fact that this is happening. That Eddie Kaspbrak is in his bed, telling him he loves him back. It's like a goddamn dream. He hopes he never wakes up.

"I love you so much, Eds." Richie whispers, tracing his finger down the the bridge of Eddie's nose. Eddie doesn't question his actions, but offers a slight glare at the nickname.

"Stop calling me that." He says with no conviction behind it.

"You love it when I call you Eds."

When Eddie doesn't respond, Richie smiles triumphantly and leans down so their noses brush together. He tries to push forward, seeking out the other boy's lips, but Eddie raises a hand to cover Richie's mouth.

"You haven't even brushed your teeth yet." He's blushing as he says it. His tone is sharp, speaking to how he's still a little self-conscious about the lingering fears from his childhood. Richie thinks it's adorable.

"Fine." He says, moving to sit up. "I'll be right back." He really is about to clamber out of the bed and go brush his teeth, just because it'll make Eddie more comfortable, when the other boy's hand closes

around his wrist, tugging him back down.

“Actually, don’t bother.” And then *Eddie* is kissing *him*.

It feels like coming home.

His lips rest gently against Eddie’s, any and all movement slow and lazy, like they’ve got all the time in the world to do this. When he turns Eddie onto his back, draping his body over him, he can feel the heat of an early Sunday morning sun on his shoulders. It’s nothing compared to the warmth of Eddie underneath him.

And, *damn*, Eddie is a good kisser. Like, better than him. It’s a skill level in kissing that Richie didn’t even know was possible. He really hopes he doesn’t embarrass himself.

Even as he dips his head, pressing open-mouthed kisses to the hollow of Eddie’s throat and earning a moan of approval in return, he wonders if the other boy is silently comparing him to his ex. Or to the guy at the party. Guys with more experience. Guys who probably had an easier time breathing with their faces buried in Eddie’s neck.

But then.

“Richie...” Eddie’s voice is soft, a little desperate, and absolutely perfect as he slides his fingers into the hair at the back of Richie’s head.

Suddenly it doesn’t matter where Eddie’s been before now, or who he’s been there with. What matters is that he’s warm and wanting beneath Richie’s fingers, whispering his name. What matters is that Eddie is *here*, with *Richie*.

“Richie.” It comes again, with more force this time, and Richie lifts his head.

“Hmm?”

Eddie’s breathing is heavier than before, and he’s gasping a little as he swallows and beckons Richie closer.

“Come here.”

Richie has only moved down maybe two inches, but he adjusts himself so that he's eye to eye with Eddie again. Taking one side of Eddie's face in his hand, he smiles down at him.

"You look good like this."

"What, on your bed?" Eddie asks with a small raise of his eyebrows. Richie shrugs.

"I was going to say underneath me, but that works too." He traces his thumb across Eddie's bottom lip, blinking in surprise as a frustrated groan forms in the other boy's chest. "What's wrong?"

"Just—" Burying his fingers in the curls behind Richie's ears, Eddie pulls him down until their mouths meet again.

It's different this time, harder. Eddie's mouth takes a little more now, and Richie is perfectly willing to give, willing to be guided. A thumb, pressed into his jaw just right, coaxes his mouth open, and Richie gasps when Eddie's tongue makes the first move.

Fuck, he really hadn't planned for this.

He'd been prepared for fumbling hands and clashing teeth, maybe some laughter shared between their mouths. He'd been prepared for that same nervous, shy tone Eddie used when he marveled over being flirted with. He'd been prepared for almost anything *except* this. The thought had never even crossed his mind that *Eddie fucking Kaspbrak* might know exactly what he's doing.

But it's not like Richie is complaining. He lets Eddie take the wheel and control the pace. It's partly because he feels inexperienced in comparison, but it's also because he's known Eddie all his life. He knows that Eddie likes to be in control, even if it doesn't always translate correctly.

Richie pulls away and presses a gentle kiss to Eddie's nose.

"What was that?" Eddie asks, still a little out of breath and clearly surprised by the change in pace.

“Always wanted to kiss you there.” Richie answers simply, dropping his head to kiss the side of Eddie’s neck too. “And there.”

Eddie not-so-subtly tilts his head to the side as Richie’s mouth moves across his jaw next. And then to the top of his chest, tugging the collar of Eddie’s shirt down as he does.

When he lifts his head again, Eddie almost looks disappointed.

“Is that it?” He asks. His gaze shifts back and forth between Richie’s eyes and his lips like he can’t decide which he wants to look at more.

Richie chews on his lip for a moment before he shakes his head and moves his mouth to Eddie’s ear.

“Not even fucking close, Kaspbrak.”

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Twenty-five and a half days later, six of the Losers finally graduate high school.

They sit in metal chairs in their blue caps and gowns and cheer as loud as possible when each of their friends crosses the stage. They’re definitely the most obnoxious people in the audience— even Mike screams his head off from a few rows back where he’s sitting with their families.

The ceremony doesn’t last too long as their graduating class is only about fifty students. But to Richie, it feels like an eternity.

He’s been waiting for this for so long, has been crossing off days on his mental calendar until he can finally be free of this fucking town. But now...

Now he has Eddie. He has someone that almost makes staying in this shithole worth it. Glancing at the back of Eddie’s head, he briefly wonders if it’s too late to get a refund on his plane ticket to Chicago.

The ceremony ends and Richie instantly makes a beeline for Eddie

and the other Losers. They've formed a small group near the stage and their families are pushing different combinations of them together for pictures.

Richie pretends like he doesn't notice that his parents aren't there, and the rest of the Losers make up for it by dragging him into every single picture they take. Even the other parents, despite the glimmer of pity in their eyes, smile and usher Richie closer, not saying a word other than, *"We're so proud of all of you."*

After the parents have had their fill and politely wander off, the Losers huddle closer. Richie's attention is immediately drawn to Eddie, and he sets his sights on getting closer.

"Hey." Richie says softly as he comes up behind Eddie. Richie unzips the top of his gown just so he can breathe, and realizes Eddie has already done the same. He can see the collar of a well-worn shirt just beneath the edges of the bright blue fabric.

"Hi." Eddie turns to face Richie, and takes a step back so that they're just barely touching, barely toe to toe. Neither of them says anything else.

Their hands swing lightly at their sides, fingers brushing against each other every few seconds and Richie feels like he could live in this moment forever.

"We did it, bitches!" Beverly yells, throwing her arms up into the air. The rest of them follow suit, cheering in response. It breaks the small, concentrated infinity Richie and Eddie had found themselves in, but they join in with the rest of their friends anyway. When they swing their own arms into the air, their fingers are linked tight.

"I'm s-s-so proud of us, g-guys." Bill says, throwing an arm around Stan's shoulders.

"Honestly, I'm surprised you guys survived." Mike chimes in, earning a collective glare from everyone else.

"Shut up, homeschool." Richie says.

The parents wander back not long after, and they suffer through what feels like a thousand more photos before they finally manage to break away for good. Or at least, for the rest of the day. Surprisingly well behaved, all of the parents— even Mrs. K— make short work of their goodbyes and before long, the Losers are left loitering on the field.

Bev, Ben, and Mike chatter animatedly about their plans for the evening: a party, of course. Just the seven of them, probably down at the quarry. Richie's shoulder-to-shoulder with Eddie as they listen to group's plan somehow leading into Stan and Bill talking about the vacation they're taking this summer.

Richie jumps when he feels Eddie's hand brush against his before he laces their fingers together again— he can't seem to remember when or why they separated in the first place. Beverly notices and offers Richie a smile. He actually blushes in response.

After a little while, Richie tugs Eddie away from the rest of the group.

"What's wrong?" Eddie asks the moment they're out of earshot from the rest of the group. Richie squeezes his hand.

"Nothing." He assures him. "I just wanted to get you alone for a minute." Eddie smiles sheepishly as Richie slips his arms around his waist.

"You had me alone last night." He reminds his boyfriend. Even so, Eddie leans into the embrace and presses his forehead against Richie's jaw. With a blush, he adds "And pretty much every night before that for the last week." Richie shrugs and the movement jostles Eddie too.

"Sue me for wanting you all to myself."

"You already have me all to yourself." Eddie tells him, hands resting gently on the Richie's biceps. There's an enthusiasm in his words that doesn't quite fit the events in the coming week and Richie's face falls.

"Yeah, for now." He mutters, thinking about the date on his and

Beverly's plane tickets— next Friday. Despite being nearly a week away, Richie feels like it's hurtling towards him. He's helpless to stop it and doesn't even really want to try. The conflict in his his heart is dripping from his words. Under his breath, Richie says, "I finally have you, and now I'm losing you."

Eddie uses one of his hands to tip up Richie's chin.

"Maybe not." He says. Richie furrows his eyebrows, trying to read Eddie's expression.

"What do you mean?"

"It was supposed to be a surprise." Eddie sighs. He looks away from Richie's face with a pinched and fond expression. He bites his lip as he continues. "But..."

"But?" Richie asks, thoroughly confused.

"After the summer's over, I'm going to North Central." Richie's eyes widen at Eddie's words.

"Wait, but that's in—"

"Naperville, yeah." Eddie answers. "Which is 33.3 miles outside of Chicago."

"Eds." Richie says, earning a glare. "You don't have to do that for me. You should go wherever you want to." Eddie grasps Richie's hands in his own.

"I'm not doing it for you, dumbass. I'm doing it for *me*." He says with a smile. "I'm not ready to lose you yet, either." Almost as an afterthought, he squeezes Richie's hands as he holds them. One reassurance, stacked upon another.

"You couldn't lose me even if you wanted to." Richie says. He squeezes back before pulling his hands from Eddie's. Lifting them to the sides of Eddie's neck, he allows his nails to gently press into the smaller boy's skin. "Not now that I finally have you in my clutches."

“You’re an idiot.” Eddie pulls Richie’s hands from his neck, rolling his eyes. But Richie doesn’t miss the shiver that runs through Eddie as Richie’s nail scrape against him.

“Yeah, but I’m *your* idiot, now.” Richie leans down to kiss him, but Eddie presses gently on his chest, pushing him back.

“Don’t make me regret it, okay?” He’s looking up at Richie carefully; some might hear the sharp tone and take it at face value, but Richie hears it for what it is. Fear, uncertainty, excitement all mingling together.

Richie hears it because he feels it too. Their future is stretching out in front of them and there’s no telling what might be waiting for them.

“No promises.” Richie waits and lets the words hang between them. He lets the enormity of them rest on both their shoulders, before giving in to the urge burning in his chest.

This time, when Richie moves to kiss him, Eddie meets him halfway.

“Fuck, I love you.” Richie whispers when they break apart, pushing his forehead against Eddie’s.

“Hey, are you two done over there or what?” Beverly calls from a few feet away. Richie groans and throws her a glare.

“Absolutely not.” Richie replies, indignant. He doesn’t think he’ll ever be done kissing Eddie, not if he can help it.

Curling a hand around the back of Eddie’s neck, he kisses him again, making sure that all the different things he feels show through in it: all the fear, all the excitement. He sighs as Eddie kisses back with the same fervor.

“I love you too,” Eddie says loud enough for their friends to hear.

The Losers’ collective groaning is drowned out by the sound of Eddie laughing against his mouth, and Richie is pretty sure he’s never been

happier.

**Author's Note:**

psa: like i said before, a significant portion of the graduation scene was written by my good friend erin (punk\_rock\_yuppie). she truly performed cpr on that scene and brought it back to life. if you want to see some bomb ass writing, go check out her profile! she's crazy talented.